Metz: Essais I and Film Theory

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"Semiotics as we now understand it must always rest on a double support: On the one hand, upon linguistics, and, on the other hand, upon the theory peculiar to the field under consideration."
—C. Metz, *Essais I* (1968), p. 121f.

Two of Christian Metz's three books have appeared for the first time in English this year, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma,* Vol. I (Klincksieck, Paris, 1968) and *Langage et cinéma* (Larousse, Paris, 1971). The latter is translated straightforwardly as *Language and Cinema* (Mouton, The Hague, 1974). The former becomes *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Oxford, New York, 1974). Not yet available in translation is *Essais,* Vol. II (Klinksieck, Paris, 1972).

Essais I (1968) is already an historical book. It collects essays written between 1964 and 1968 (the English edition omits the bibliographical details of the original). Thus some of its contents have taken ten years to reach these shores. Since 1964, of course, research has advanced and theoretical structures have changed greatly. The book itself has been critiqued and commented on by many writers. Scarcely a line has escaped deconstructive examination.*

Metz's own later writings appear to question many of the positions of *Essais I,* though both subsequent books defend the principal theoretical effort of the first, the analysis of the *grande syntagmatique* of the image-track. It is reported

that Metz's current lectures are pursuing lines of inquiry quite different from those of all his writings to date, focussing especially on materialist and psychoanalytic approaches to cinema. This is welcome news indeed, though an author's change of mind does not affect the need to read important books. The first attempt to construct a semiotics of the cinema is one of these.

Essais I can be read in two kinds of ways. Since the book contains discussions of many particular questions in semiotics and in film theory, such topics may be discussed apart from the book as a whole and their place in it. When the question of analogy in cinema is discussed, Metz's position is one of those which may be reviewed and critiqued. On the other hand, the book as a whole weaves its positions on various questions into a single, overall argument, in this case that leading to presentation of the *grande syntagmatique.* Our interest is in the latter operation, partly because most critiques have tended to deal with Metz's positions one-by-one. Perhaps the best of these, Michel Cegarra's in *Cinéthique,* is virtually a line-by-line critique. Such analyses are useful though, of course, they are not exhaustive. Attention to this level misses relations, operations, and configurations at other levels, particularly the larger patterns of discursive interaction and the relationship of questions posed to questions omitted or suppressed which constitutes the problematic of a text.

Nor does our attention to the book's overall argument claim to be exhaustive. We are most interested in the book's claim to inaugurate a semiotics of the cinema and with its claims, explicit and implicit, that this constitutes a break with previous discourses on film. Thus we are concerned with examining Metz's deployment of the discourses of linguistics and semiology. But we are equally interested in the other large discourses which mix with these in the book, particularly those of phenomenology, film theory, and the structural analysis of narrative (itself a

*See, among others: Emilio Garroni, *Semiotica ed Estetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1968); Umberto Eco, *La Structure Absente* (Mercure de France, 1972), "Articulations of the Cinematic Code," *Cinemantics,* No. 1 (Jan., 1970); Kristeva, Cegarra, *Cinéthique,* Heath pieces in *Screen,* Vol. 14/1–2 (Spring–Summer 1973); Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. XXVIII/2 (Winter 1974–75); Brian Henderson, "Critique of Cine-Structuralism, I & II," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. XXVII/1 & 2 (Fall 1973; Winter 1973–74).

branch of semiology). We are interested in differentiating the places of these discourses in the structure of the argument; in tracing their dynamic interaction, i.e., the mutual pressures they exert; and in charting what might be called the general economy of the *Essais I* text as it unfolds by virtue of now one, now another of these discourses, or now a certain conjunction of them, now another.

We begin with certain positions of Metz which have been much discussed: the methodological centrality of the narrative film to a semiology of the cinema, the problem of analogy in cinema, and whether or not, and if so, in what sense, cinema is a language. We do not propose to review in detail Metz's positions on these questions, let alone critiques by others. But minimal review of these positions is necessary to indicate

WHO IS CHRISTIAN METZ AND WHY IS EVERYBODY SAYING THESE AWFUL THINGS ABOUT HIM?

For some years the specter of a possible new film theory has haunted film journals. Semiotics, structuralism, Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis: such systems of thought have been put forward as possible keys to a theoretical breakthrough. We would all, no doubt, like to see new theoretical work of real power and originality; it is high time to get past where Bazin left film theory in the late fifties. As I argued in the last issue, however, for the most part the would-be theoretical activity to date has been so abstract as to be vacuous. Thus **FQ** has devoted space to it grudgingly, preferring to wait for ideas more rigorously developed, and with more visibly productive application to actual films. Metz's semiological texts, however, have now become widely enough accessible in English that some discussion of them seems obligatory. (Metz is a professor in the 6e Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris. He is part of a working group including Barthes, Todorov, and Greimas which is in the Centre d'Etudes de Communications de Masse. He is in his forties and holds the world's first and doubtless only **doctorat** in semiology.)

We present here two articles which should reduce further discussion of Metz, at least,

to low priority. In the first article, Brian Henderson relates Metz's work to earlier film theory and dissects the basic Metzian concepts from inside. He shows how, even in Metz's own terms, the doctrine is (in the technical sense) incoherent; it cannot, thus, really be discussed further since it does not properly exist. In the second article, Bill Nichols attacks not only Metz's semiology but other structural-linguistic approaches to cinema, arguing that the digital concepts of linguistics have inherently limited application to a medium where communication takes place partly in analog dimensions. Readers may also be curious about a third attack on Metz, focusing on his ideological evasiveness, which has been written by James Roy MacBean using a Marxist approach; this will appear in his book **Film and Politics** (soon to be published by Indiana University Press), and we may be able to publish a shorter version of it in our next issue.

For the future, **FQ** intends to hew to the line laid down in the last issue, and exemplified by the Nichols article in this issue: theoretical work must constantly link theory and practice, which means producing useful understandings of real films and not theoretical simulacra of them.   — E. C.

the overall plan of the argument, specifically to show how they prepare the presentation of the *grande syntagmatique.*

Several passages of *Essais I* argue the historical supremacy of the narrative film. It was not unavoidable that film develop along narrative lines, but this is what happened. Going to the movies has long meant going to see a filmed story. Narrative was the demand of audiences, but cinema's "inner semiological mechanism" made it especially well suited to tell stories in any case: "Narrativity and logomorphism. It is as if a kind of induction current were linking images among themselves, whatever one did, as if the human mind (the spectator's as well as the film-maker's) were incapable of not making a connection between two successive images." (p. 46) Thus Metz's reinterpretation of Kuleshov. Not scientific montage alone, *any* cinematic construction (however random) will be read narratively by viewers.

These historical and mediumistic questions give way to the methodological questions which they mask: what body of films is the semiologist to study and why? Metz grants that the answer depends upon what one wants to study, but he does not leave it at that: "Nevertheless, there is a hierarchy of concerns (or, better yet, a methodological urgency) that favors—in the beginning at least—the study of narrative film." (p. 93) Again Metz mentions the "historical and social fact" of "the merging of the cinema and of narrativity." The feature-length film of novelistic fiction (which is simply called a film) has traced more and more clearly the king's highway of filmic expression. Moreover, nonnarrative films are different principally by virtue of their content, not by their language processes: "It is by no means certain that an independent semiotics of the nonnarrative genres is possible other than in the form of a series of discontinuous remarks on the points of difference between these films and 'ordinary' films. To examine fiction films is to proceed more directly and more rapidly to the heart of the problem." (p. 94)

Moreover, historically speaking, it was by virtue of confronting the problems of narration that it came to produce a body of specific signifying procedures. "Thus, it was in a single motion that the cinema became narrative and took over some of the attributes of a language." (p. 96).

Metz seems somewhat embarrassed by these arguments today, and for good reason. They are not only specious, but needless. The narrative film is merely one of many possible objects of film semiotics. If one chooses to study it rather than something else that choice cannot be justified. Metz's argument serves to enhance his own project and his own choice: "to move to the heart of the problem." This is a delusion which is no longer possible. (Better to say with Barthes: "The text I have chosen . . . is Balzac's *Sarrasine.*") If Metz can provide the groundwork for a semiotics of the narrative film, that is quite enough. To claim (in advance, yet) that this is the semiotics of film itself is ideological in several senses. Cegarra argues that Metz's centralizing the narrative film in his studies is complicit in that cinema's social and economic domination of the world's production and consumption.

Metz's position on the problem of analogy or iconicity is also fundamental to his overall argument. Each image is unique *because* it reproduces some object or view of the world directly. That is, it does not encode the world, as language does, by translating it into some system other than its own. The diversity of images in cinema is the world's diversity. Metz's subscription to the theory of analogy in cinema and in photographic *duplication* more generally founds his theory of filmic discourse. Speaking of Méliès, Porter, Griffith, the pioneers of "cinematographic language," he says: "Men of denotation rather than of connotation, they wanted above all to tell a story; they were not content unless they could subject the continuous, analogical material of photographic duplication to the *articulations*—however rudimentary—of a narrative discourse." (p. 95)

It is important here to introduce Umberto Eco's critique of the notion of analogy, in "Articulations of the Cinematic Code." Eco concludes: "Thus we can say that everything which in images appears to us still as analogical,

continuous, non-concrete, motivated, natural, and therefore 'irrational,' is simply something which, in our present state of knowledge and operational capacities, we have not yet succeded in reducing to the discrete, the digital, the purely differential. As for the mysterious phenomenon of the image which 'resembles,' it may be enough for the moment to have recognized processes of codification concealed in the mechanisms of perception themselves."

It seems from the footnotes to *Essais I,* written after the original essays, that Metz accepts Eco's critique. This acceptance does not, however, lead to substantial revision of Metz's position. There seem to be two related points or principles which permit Metz to accept this change at one level without corresponding changes at other levels: "Contrary to what I believed four years ago, it does not seem at all impossible to me, today, to assume that analogy is itself coded without however ceasing to function authentically as analogy in relation to the codes of the superior level—which are brought into play only on the basis of this first assumption." (p. 111–112)

The other assumption is that of the first essay in the book, "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in which Metz argues in a phenomenological manner that the correspondence between image and reality in cinema is less important than that viewers perceive or *intend* the images of cinema as reality. Not reality but a certain impression of reality is the basis of Metz's argument.

Thus Metz seeks to "contain" the potentially disruptive effect of Eco's critique. The efficacy of his attempt cannot be considered here. In any case, the structure of Metz's system does not change.

Metz devotes considerably more attention to the problem of whether film is a language. He argues that the early film theorists—Eisenstein, Bazin, and most others—spoke of film as a language, but in fact knew nothing of linguistics. Metz then proceeds to draw upon linguistic science in order to answer the question precisely and authoritatively. He proceeds slowly, carefully, apparently exhaustively through a detailed comparison between the linguistic and the cine-

matic media, determining point by point what is like and what is unlike between them and what the consequences of these similarities and dissimilaries are. The method is indirect but, he argues,

> To understand what film is not is to gain time, rather than to lose it, in the attempt to grasp what film is. I call one of them the "first stage" because it benefits from the capital of linguistics, which encourages one to begin with it. The "second stage" is properly semiotic and translinguistic; it is less able to depend on previously acquired knowledge, so that, far from being helped, it must, on the contrary, participate—if it is able—in work that is new. Thus it is condemned to suffer the present discomfort of semiotics. (p. 61)

Metz comes immediately to a fundamental dissimilarity: cinema has nothing corresponding to the double articuluation of natural language. In the latter, phonemes are distinctive units without proper signification, signifiers without corresponding signifieds. It is only when phonemes are articulated at a second level, by combination into monemes or words, that signification occurs. Only at the second level do phonemes (in combination) acquire signifieds. But in cinema every shot involves signification; every shot has a signified. What is missing is the first articulation. Thus in film, unlike natural language, "it is impossible to break up the signifier without getting isomorphic segments of the signified." (p. 63) A consequence of double articulation is a great distance between content and expression in natural language; in cinema the distance is "too short."

Not only does the cinema have no phonemes —it has no words either. The image or shot corresponds instead to one or more sentences; the sequence is a complex segment of discourse (i.e., a paragraph or chapter, a unit composed *of* several sentences). A shot has nothing incomplete about it; it is "a completed assertive statement." The image is *always actualized.* Even a close-up of a revolver, which would seem equivalent to the word "revolver," signifies at the very least "Here is a revolver!" Thus the image is always speech, never a unit of language.

From this, Metz moves to a related point. While the combinatory or syntagmatic possibili-

ties of cinema are very rich, its paradigmatic re-
sources are surprisingly poor. This is another
way of saying that every image is unique, there-
fore, strictly speaking, unsubstitutable. "Every
image is a hapax (a unique determination)."
(p. 69) Thus images do not (or only very gen-
erally) assume their meaning from paradigmatic
opposition to other images; whereas words are
always more or less embedded in paradigmatic
networks of meaning and indeed create meaning
by virtue of such systems. But this poverty of the
paradigm in film is the counterpart of a wealth
distributed elsewhere: the film-maker can ex-
press himself by showing us directly the diversity
of the world. Certain camera movements (rear
and forward dolly) and techniques of punctua-
tion (dissolve or cut) have the character of low-
level paradigms, but their leverage on the total
expression is not strong.

Thus the cinema is not a language system (it
is a language of art) because it contradicts three
important characteristics of the linguistic fact:
a language is a *system* of *signs* used for *inter-
communication*. Like all the arts, cinema is a
one-way communication. It is only partly a sys-
tem. Finally, it uses only very few true signs.
The image is first and always an image. There-
fore the nerve center of the film-semiological
process lies elsewhere.

This elsewhere is the large syntagmatic or-
ganization of the image-track. Here Metz dis-
covers an unusual fact.

> Although each image is a free creation, the arrange-
> ment of these images into an intelligible sequence—
> cutting and montage—brings us to the heart of the
> semiological dimension of film. It is a rather para-
> doxical situation: Those proliferating (and not very
> discrete!) units—the *images*—when it is a matter of
> composing a film, suddenly accept with reasonably
> good grace the constraint of a few large syntagmatic
> structures. While no image ever entirely resembles
> another image, the great majority of narrative films
> resemble each other in their principal syntagmatic
> figures. (p. 101)

This regularity is due, historically and structur-
ally, to the narrative function of cinema. It was
by confronting the problem of narrativity that
cinema became a language, historically; and it
is by this function that regularity is sustained.

The key fact here is that in cinema the denota-
tion itself must be organized. "In still photo-
graphy this is not so. A photo of a house denotes
the house by virtue of its automatic reproduction
of its subject. In the cinema, on the other hand,
a whole semiotics of denotation is possible and
necessary, for a film is composed of *many* photo-
graphs (the concept of montage, with its myriad
consequences)—photographs that give us mostly
only partial views of the diegetic referent."

> Thus a kind of filmic *articulation* appears, which
> has no equivalent in photography: It is the denota-
> tion itself that is being constructed, organized, and
> to a certain extent codified (codified, not necessarily
> *encoded*). Lacking absolute laws, filmic intelligibility
> nevertheless depends on a certain number of dom-
> inant habits: A film put together haphazardly would
> not be understood. (p. 99)

Thus, Metz summarizes, "cinematographic lan-
guage" is first of all the literalness of a plot.
Artistic effects, even when they are substantially
inseparable from the semic act by which the film
tells us its story, nevertheless constitute another
level of signification, which from the methodo-
logical point of view must come later.

Thus filmic narrativity gradually shaped itself
into forms that are more or less fixed, but not
immutable. They are a "synchronic state" (that
of the present cinema), which can change only
through gradual evolution. With Saussure one
can say that the large syntagmatic category of
the narrative film *can change,* but no single per-
son can make it change over night.

From this point, Metz proceeds to present and
analyze the principal types of large filmic syn-
tagma, which organize filmic denotation. Before
doing so, he summarizes:

> The cinema is certainly not a language system
> *(langue)*. It can, however, be considered as a *lan-
> guage,* to the extent that it orders signifying ele-
> ments within ordered arrangements different from
> those of spoken idioms—and to the extent that these
> elements are not traced on the perceptual configura-
> tions of reality itself (which does not tell stories).
> Filmic manipulation transforms what might have
> been a mere visual transfer of reality into discourse.
> Derived from a kind of signification that is purely
> analogous and continuous—animated photography,
> cinematography—the cinema gradually shaped, in

the course of its diachronic maturation, some elements of a proper semiotics, which remain scattered and fragmentary within the open field of simple visual duplication." (p. 105)

Besides preparing the way for the *grande syntagmatique,* Metz uses his various points to refute once and for all the metaphor of film-as-language. There is no arguing with Metz here. Eisenstein, Bazin, etc., were wrong. Far less certain is how important this point is. Metz seems to think it very important, one of the chief achievements of his work. To establish this, however, one would have to show the precise operational effect that this metaphor had within each theory concerned: show not only that Eisenstein or Bazin used the metaphor but what they used it to think or theorize. Our sense is that the metaphor was in both theories relatively non-operative. Change the word and you do not fundamentally alter the theoretical position of each or the rhetoric of filmic figures that each adumbrated. If this is the center of Metz's achievement, it is an empty center.

After further preliminaries, Metz's text is prepared to present its own system. ("The time has come for a semiotics of the cinema.") This occurs in Ch 5, Sec. 5, "The Large Syntagmatic Category of the Image Track."*

The first four paragraphs inaugurate the project:

> So far, I have examined only the status of "cinematographic grammar," and I have said nothing

about its *content.* I have not given the table of the codified orderings of various kinds used in film.

It is not possible here to give this table in its complete form, with all the explanations required by each one of the indicated orderings, and with the *principles of commutation* between them (and consequently to enumerate them).

Let us content ourselves, then, with the almost unpolished "result,"—the table itself in a summarized form—and only that part of it that outlines the large syntagmatic category of the image track (i.e., the codified and signifying orderings on the level of the *large* units of the film, and ignoring the elements of sound and speech). Naturally this problem constitutes only one of the chapters of "cinematographic syntax."

In order to determine the number and the nature of the main syntagmatic *types* used in current films, one must start from common observation (existence of the "scene," the "sequence," "alternate montage," etc.) as well as on certain "presemiotic" analyses by critics, historians, and theoreticians of the cinema ("tables of montage," various classifications, etc.).† This preliminary work must account for several points of importance—that is why it in no way precludes the viewing of numerous films—and it must then be organized into a coherent body—that is to say, into a list of all the main types of image-orderings occurring in films under the various headings

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*Every page (but one) of this 15-page passage has at least one footnote, sometimes two, often longer than the page itself. The first four paragraphs, those which inaugurate the system ("The time has come . . . ") contain four footnotes, three of which contain important theoretical material, crucial to Metz's project. This does not include the material set off in four sets of parentheses and three sets of dashes, let alone that in the many parentheses and dashes in the footnotes themselves. These graphic/discursive signifiers indicate a text under extreme pressure, in which the smooth surface of discourse is broken again and again by exceptions, doubts, alternative formulations, background information, anticipations of objections, promises of future refinement and development, etc. No other portion of the book exhibits anything like this degree of textual stress. We consider why this is so below.

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†Among the authors who have devised tables of montage, or classifications of various kinds—or who have studied separately a specific type of montage—I am indebted to Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, Timochenko, Bela Balázs, Rudolf Arnheim, André Bazin, Edgar Morin, Gilbert Cohen-Séat, Jean Mitry, Marcel Martin, Henri Agel, Francois Chevassu, Anne Souriau . . . and one or two others perhaps whom I have unintentionally overlooked.

Because there is not enough room here, I will not (at least in this text) indicate how the various classifications of these authors are distributed in relation to each specific point of my chart. But it must not be forgotten that, among the various "image constructions" identifiable in films, some were defined and analyzed (very ingeniously at times) before the appearance of an actual semiological method. There were also larger attempts at classification, which are extremely instructive even in their failings. Semiotics as we now understand it must always rest on a double support: On the one hand, upon linguistics, and, on the other hand, upon the theory peculiar to the field under consideration. (pp. 119–121)

into which they are naturally classified. (pp. 120–121)

One thus arrives at a first "tabulation" of the syntagmatic components of films—a chart remaining fairly close to the concrete filmic material, but which, from the point of view of semiological theory, is as yet insufficiently developed. (p. 121)

The balance of Section 5 presents Metz's *"la grande syntagmatique,"* the large syntagmatic category of the image-track. Presented finally in the form of a chart or general table (p. 145–146), this is "the table of the codified orderings of various kinds used in film." (p. 119) Metz expounds the *grande syntagmatique* by describing each syntagmatic type in turn, opposing those that might seem similar through example and conceptual distinction. He notes several versions of his table and the crucial difference between the first and the second beyond the addition of two types:

It appears that the different types and subtypes that composed the first table, where they were presented in the purely enumerative form of a list, can be redistributed into a system of successive dichotomies, according to a procedure commonly used in linguistics. This scheme gives us a better outline of the *deep structure* of the choices that confront the filmmaker for each one of the "sequences" of his film. In this way, an empirical and purely inductive classification was later able to be converted into a deductive system; in other words, a factual situation, initially ascertained and clarified, later showed itself to be more logical than one might have predicted (see table). (p. 123)

Reorganized, the table presents a series of seven binary oppositions or rather a system of binary oppositions at six different levels. These are: among autonomous segments, autonomous shots vs. syntagmas; among syntagmas, chronological and achronological syntagmas; among achronological syntagmas, parallel and bracket syntagmas; among chronological syntagmas, narrative and descriptive syntagmas; among narrative syntagmas, alternative narrative and linear narrative syntagmas; among linear narrative syntagmas, scenes and sequences; among sequences, episodic and ordinary sequences.

Metz defines the autonomous segment in general as "a subdivision of the first order in film; it is therefore a part of a film, and not a part of a part of a film" (p. 123). "It is clear nevertheless that the 'autonomy' of the autonomous segments themselves is not an *independence,* since each autonomous segment derives its final meaning in relation to the film as a whole, the latter being the *maximum syntagma* of the cinema." (p. 123) The first and primary division among autonomous segments is that between autonomous shots and syntagmas. The former contain one shot, the latter (including seven subclassifications) all contain several shots. In the unique case of the autonomous plot, a single shot presents an episode of the plot. It is therefore the only instance where a single shot constitutes a primary, and not a secondary, subdivision of the film. The autonomous shot is by definition not a syntagma, but it *is* a syntagmatic type, since it is one of the types that occur in the global syntagmatic structure of the film. "More generally speaking, syntagmatic analysis is a part of semiotics in which one is *initially* confronted with 'discourses' that are always syntagmas of different magnitudes, but in which the units one *isolates as one proceeds* are not necessarily all syntagmas—for some of them may not be divisible in every case." (p. 124)

Among syntagmas, a second criterion allows the distinction between nonchronological syntagmas and chronological syntagmas. In the first, the temporal relationship between the facts presented in the different images is not defined by the film; in the second kind it is. Of nonchronological syntagmas, there is the parallel syntagma, in which montage interweaves two or more alternating motifs, but no precise relationship, whether temporal or spatial, is assigned to them, at least on the level of denotation. This kind of montage has a direct symbolic value. There is also the bracket syntagma, in which a series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical samples of a same order of reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other, in order to emphasize their presumed kinship within a category of facts that the film-maker wants to describe in visual terms. Each little scene is taken as an element in a system of allusions, and therefore it is the series, rather than the individual, that the film takes into account. This con-

struction suggests that among the occurrences it groups together, there is the same relationship as that between words in a typographic bracket. Frequently the different successive evocations are strung together through optical effects.

In the chronological syntagmas, the temporal relationships between the facts that successive images show us are defined on the level of denotation. But these precise relationships are not necessarily those of consecutiveness; they may also be relations of simultaneity. In the descriptive syntagma, the relationship between *all* the motifs successively presented on the screen is one of simultaneity. It is the only case of consecutiveness on the screen that does not correspond to any diegetic consciousness. Objects in a descriptive syntagma have a relation of spatial coexistence, not any temporal relation.

Chronological syntagmas other than the descriptive are narrative syntagmas, i.e., those in which the temporal relationship between the objects seen in the images contains elements of consecutiveness and not only of simultaneity. Among narrative syntagmas, the alternate syntagma interweaves several temporal progressions (the old "parallel montage"). The montage presents alternately two or more series of events in such a way that within each series the temporal relationships are consecutive, but that, between the series taken as wholes, the temporal relationship is one of simultaneity.

The linear narrative syntagma presents a single succession linking together all the acts seen in the images. Succession may be continuous or discontinuous. When succession is continuous, i.e., with no diegetic breaks, we have a scene, a spatio-temporal integrality experienced as being without flaws. (This was the only construction known to early film-makers; it exists as a type among others today.) Here the signifier is fragmentary—a number of shots— but the signifieds are unified and continuous.

Opposed to the scene are the various kinds of linear narrative syntagma in which the temporal order of acts presented is discontinuous: the sequences. These include the ordinary sequence, in which the temporal discontinuity is unorganized (as though scattered). Or the discontinuity may be ordered, and may therefore be the principle of structure and intelligibility in the sequence—the episodic sequence. Little scenes are strung together, usually separated by optical devices, and they succeed each other in chronological order. The scenes must not be taken as separate instances but only in their totality. This construction can be used to condense gradual progressions. In both there is the concept of a single concatenation plus the concept of discontinuity. In the episodic sequence, each of the images appears distinctly as the symbolic summary of one stage in the fairly long evolution condensed by the total sequence. In the ordinary sequence, each one of the units in the narrative simply presents one of the unskipped moments of the action. In the former, each image stands for more than itself and is perceived as taken from a group of other possible images representing a single phase of a progression. In the ordinary sequence each image represents only what it shows.

The *grande syntagmatique* concerns the syntagmatic ordering of the denotative meanings of the image track. Though Metz's semiotics of film does not concern the paradigmatic dimensions of filmic communication he argues also that the system of eight syntagmatic segment-types constitutes itself a paradigm of filmic construction: each segment of a film may be constructed in at least eight ways. Metz's semiotics also excludes connotation. It is concerned with "the literal temporality of the plot, the first message of the film." (p. 117) This is why "filmic orderings that are codified and significant constitute a grammar —because they organize not only filmic connotation, but also, and *primarily,* denotation." (p. 117) Metz defends this exclusion in several ways. First, connotation is more difficult to determine than denotation and always itself builds on denotation as secondary meaning (cf. Barthes, *Mythologies*). Since film semiotics is just beginning and since denotation must be determined first in any case, it is advisable to take on the system of denotation in cinema as a separate topic. Secondly, in cinema even more than in other semiotic systems, connotation is nothing other than a form of denotation (p. 118): "[F]ilms are able to connote without generally requiring *special* (i.e., separate) connotors

because they have the most essential signifiers of connotation at their permanent disposal: the choice between several ways of structuring denotation." (p. 119)

We note the important consequences of Metz's double choice here. As Cegarra says, citing Barthes, ideology is the signified of connotation. Metz's exclusion of connotation eliminates the study of ideology in cinema from his semiotics.* (This is just one of the points on which Metz, apparently following Baudry and other critics, has changed his mind.)

These are the bare bones of Metz's argument. Let us now examine more carefully the theoretical operations which produce the system of the *grande syntagmatique,* looking especially to the interplay of those discourses which we identified topographically at the outset: linguistics and

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*Note that Barthes too has changed his mind; in *S/Z* he says that the primacy or centrality of denotation in relation to connotation is itself an ideological illusion, hence the notion of their separability also. "There is no reason to make this system (denotation) the privileged one, to make it the locus and the norm of a primary, original meaning, the scale for all associated meanings; if we base denotation on truth, on objectivity, on law, it is because we are still in awe of the prestige of linguistics . . . The endeavor of this hierarchy is a serious one: it is to return to the closure of Western discourse (scientific, critical, or philosohical), to its centralized organization, to arrange all the meanings of a text around the hearth of denotation (the hearth: center, guardian, refuge, light of truth)." (p. 7)

"Structurally, the existence of two supposedly different systems—denotation and connotation—enables the text to operate like a game, each system referring to the other according to the requirements of a certain *illusion.* Ideologically, finally, this game has the advantage of affording the classic text a certain *innocence:* of the two systems, denotative and connotative, one turns back on itself and indicates its own existence: the system of denotation; denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature . . . " (p. 9)

semiology, phenomenology, film theory, and the structural analysis of narrative.

We begin with a review of film theory and one version of its constituent errors and shortcomings. This will help us to identify the discourse of film theory as it operates in the *Essais I* text, but it will also help to sharpen our principal question: Does the book constitute a semiotics of cinema? Does it break decisively (or at all) with film theory? For classical film theory, its problematic, its concepts, and its structure, constitutes an important part of the background against which the discursive formation of *Essais I* must be traced.

In "Two Types of Film Theory," we characterized the classical film theories of Eisenstein, Bazin, and others as theories of cinematic parts. Both defined the basic filmic unit as the shot and considered different ways of combining these units to form larger units called sequences. Their treatment of this problem mixed descriptive, normative, historical, and philosophic discourses. Neither worked out a theory of cinematic wholes, therefore neither considered problems of part-whole relations in cinema. This was seen as a crippling defect in both theories and in classical film theory generally. Symptomatic of the theoretical problem involved is each theorist's formulation of the concept of the cinematic whole, on the few and incidental occasions on which the problem was treated. Both used genre categories borrowed principally from literary studies. Eisenstein's essay on organic unity and pathos in the composition of *Potemkin* defines the formal organization of the film as a whole as a tragedy in five acts. Bazin wrote of those cinematic genres such as gangster film, horror film, comedy, western, which organize the whole film and hence determine the content of each sequence. Bazin's theory concerns various visual treatments of the sequence; its content and its relation to the film as a whole is taken as a "given" which is not inquired into.

We noted a crucial disjunction in both theories. After detailed, technical analyses of cinematic parts and *their* internal relations, both resort to literary discourse to treat formal organization of the whole film. Why narrative should emerge as the sole category of analysis at

the level of the whole, when it has not been a category at all at lower levels, is not explained. Eisenstein and Bazin shift ground at this point. They turn to another problem as though it were the continuation of the first, as though treating a single problem from start to finish. They write as though visual parts added up to a narrative whole.

This is not Metz's critique. He criticizes classical film theory in passages here and there but never questions its foundations, fundamental assumptions, and problematic, a failure which has important consequences for his own theory. Nevertheless Metz's argument promises at several points to overcome or to bypass the difficulties noted above. First of all, Metz's book seems to derive from those modern theoretical discourses which insist on the multiplicity of levels in any system or text and on the methodological necessity of specifying the level at which a particular analysis is working. Such insistence exposes the error of theories such as the classical film theories, whose one-level epistemological model treats complex objects either by excluding important aspects or by forcing them all within a single plane, as classical film theory did with narrative and visual form. Not only were the latter forged in a false relation but important aspects of the problem were excluded altogether: those of visual wholes and of narrative parts, among others.

Secondly, Metz refers several times to that large body of work on the structural analysis of the narrative which appeared in the sixties (see *Communications*, #8, 1966) and is called by some narratology. This work posits and takes for its object the system of narrative in general, regardless of the medium of its realization. It is treacherous to generalize about this work, as Propp's analysis of narrative functions differs from Lévi-Strauss's paradigmatic analysis of mythic narratives, Greimas's narrative grammar seeks to integrate and improve on both, etc. At the least, however, each is concerned with analyzing the relations between narrative parts and wholes within a system that generates both.

On both of these grounds, Metz's text seems to promise a reconstruction of classical film theory.

"There are therefore two distinct enterprises, neither of which can replace the other: On the one hand there is the semiotics of the narrative film, such as the one I am attempting to develop; on the other hand, there is the structural analysis of actual narrativity—that is to say, of the narrative taken *independently from the vehicles carrying it* (the film, the book, etc.)." "Bremond [studies] . . . that very precise 'layer of signification' that a narrative constitutes before the intervention of the narrative 'props.' I agree entirely with this author as to the autonomy of the narrative layer itself: The *narrated event,* which is a signified in the semiotics of narrative vehicles (and notably of the cinema), becomes a signifier in the semiotics of narrativity." (pp. 144–145)

Note that Metz emphasizes here the separation and autonomy of the levels involved and of their study. What is implied here is true of the argument as a whole: Metz does not himself take up the analysis of the narrative layer of the cinematic complex. He does not analyze narrative wholes and parts and their relations. His work is to study another layer of signification, that of cinematic expression. He introduces the structural analysis of narrative not for its own sake, but to define his project in relation to it. It permits him to define his object of study more precisely.

Thus Metz does not propose a model of filmic signification in general, including identification and definition of constituent levels and a plan of their interaction. Metz instead defines two levels, only one of which he will address, and says nothing about their interaction. In doing this, he is attempting to define a level without a model of the overall field. This is a fundamental theoretical failure, for every designation of "a level" or "a layer" must presuppose some model of the whole. Where the model is not explicitly and consciously constructed by the text, it is implicit and unconscious. Of course the latter condition creates confusions and ambiguities since fundamentals of the argument are swallowed and hidden. More generally, the definition of an object of analysis without a model defining the field in which this object is constituted commits the complex of errors called empiricism, in which it is assumed that the object exists prior to the analysis and can therefore be apprehended and

analyzed directly. On the other hand, discourses such as psychoanalysis and historical materialism stipulate that theory must construct its object and the field which defines it. Exemplary here is Freud's metapsychology, which organizes the multiple levels of its object simultaneously from three standpoints, the topographical, the economic, and the dynamic.

Despite his emphasis on the autonomy and separation of the two layers, defining the narrative layer in order to specify the level of expression, other passages in Metz suggest that the units of expression will be defined in relation to the narrative level.

> The reader will perhaps have observed in the course of this article (and especially in the definition of different types of autonomous segment) that it is no easy matter to decide whether the large syntagmatic category in film involves the *cinema* or the cinematographic *narrative.* For all the units I have isolated are located *in* the film but in *relation* to the plot. This perpetual see-saw between the screen instance (which signifies) and the diegetic instance (which is signified) must be accepted and even erected into a methodological principle, for it, and only it, renders commutation possible, and thus identification of the units (in this case, the autonomous segments).
>
> One will never be able to analyze film by speaking *directly* about the diegesis (as in some of the film societies, *cinéclubs,* in France and elsewhere, where the discussion is centered around the plot and the human problems it implies), because that is equivalent to examining the signifieds without taking the signifiers into consideration. On the other hand, isolating the units without considering the diegesis *as a whole* (as in the "montage tables" of some of the theoreticians of the silent cinema) is to study the signifiers without the signifieds—since the nature of narrative film is to narrate.
>
> The autonomous segments of film correspond to as many diegetic *elements,* but not to the "diegesis" itself. The latter is the *distant signified* of the film taken as a whole: Thus a certain film will be described as "the story of an unhappy love affair set against the background of provincial bourgeois French society toward the end of the nineteenth century," etc. The partial elements of the diegesis constitute, on the contrary, the *immediate signifieds* of each filmic segment. The immediate signified is linked to the segment itself by insoluble ties of semiological reciprocity, which form the basis of the principle of commutation. (pp. 143–144)

This zone of discrepancy requires investigation,

an assertion of autonomy and separation and an assertion of relation and reciprocity. Also, if Metz defines the visual part in relation to the narrative part, then there might be an advance over classical film theory, which did not do this, even if Metz fails of those other relations: narrative whole/narrative part; visual whole/visual part; narrative whole/visual part; visual whole/narrative part, etc.

The issue arises first in Chapter 2, "Notes Toward a Phenomenology of the Narrative." Metz refers to several theorists of narrativity but he does not discuss the differences in their models, let alone choose one as superior to the others or as most appropriate to the needs of his work. Instead he seems to enlist narratology in general in behalf of his work. As in the passage quoted above, he seems to require only the idea of the narrative plane as autonomous layer, in order to found his own study by differentiation. But, since he does not define this other by specifying the differences among narratological systems, his own system has an insecure foundation. To overcome this problem, he seeks more aggressively to reduce the divergent systems of narrative to a usable core. "Although several different methods have been proposed for structurally breaking down the narrated events (which do not initially constitute discrete units), the event is still and always the basic unit of the narrative." (p. 24)

Metz herein collapses the various systems into a single concept, that of the division of the narrative into "events." In fact, each system defines the units of narrative differently and none calls its basic unit the event. Even more important, Metz takes only the concept of unit identification and discards the other elements of the theories involved. Thus each not only defines units but propounds a syntax (or syntagmatics) governing the combination of narrative units into larger units, as well as an overall model of the operation of the narrative system as a whole. Of course each system determines its own breakdown of units and syntagmatics, which means, among other things, that the set of units and the rules governing their combination are strictly correlative. Thus to extract the unit designations of a narrative system without the syntagmatics and the overall model that go with them is meaningless. It indicates a fundamental misunder-

standing of the nature of theory construction. As noted, Metz performs not only this extraction but also a reduction and assimilation of the decontexted unit designations into the general category of "the event."

Even Propp, the most empirical and syntagmatic of the group, whom Lévi-Strauss critiqued for ignoring the semantic dimension, is not at all the atomizing theorist that Metz is. Propp defined the basic units of the narrative as functions, each of which is designated by its relation to "the general economy of the tale." It is precisely this overall economic model of the whole that Metz's semiotics of the narrative film lacks. This is true not only of the narrative layer, which he does not take as object of his analysis, but of the expressive layer, which he does take. Metz attempts a syntagmatics of the part, determined empirically, i.e., without reference to an overall theoretical model.

Metz provides a justification for his reductive seizure of concepts in Chapter 2. This derives from his phenomenological theoretical base. Since the latter influences his argument decisively at several points, its operation here must be examined closely.

> It is my intention in the following paragraphs not to advance still another model, but rather, to invite the reader to reflect on what has brought about all the attempts already presented. It seems to me, indeed, that the narrative lends itself to structural analysis because it is primarily, in some way, a real object, which even the naive listener clearly recognizes and never confuses with what it is not.
>
> It might be said that the main interest of structural analysis is only in being able to find what was already there, of accounting with more precision for what naive consciousness had "picked up" without analysis.
>
> Let us say, therefore—perhaps a little cavalierly— that structural analysis always assumes, by virtue of an implicit or explicit prior stage, something like a phenomenology of its subject, or, again, that *signification* which is constructed and discontinuous) renders explicit what had first been experienced only as a perception (which is continuous and spontaneous). It is from this point of view that I would like to explore some answers to the question: How is a narrative recognized, prior to any analyses? (pp. 16–17)

The rest of the essay constructs this "narrative recognized, prior to any analysis." It is his phenomenological method, his appeal to experi-

ence, which permits Metz to bracket or to bypass the specifics of the different methods for breaking down narratives into units, in favor of a generalized notion of event. The site of this notion, which Metz admits cannot be found in any narratological system, is apparently located in the general experience of viewers. In Metz's epistemology, the experiential, phenomenological order underlies, indeed *founds* systems of narrative analysis, and all theoretical work. Hence it may be appealed to beyond the particular systems for a more general and more basic, a more originary truth. As he says toward the end of the article, "My intention is simply to remind the reader that if the narrative can be structurally analyzed into a series of predications it is because phenomenally it is a series of events." (p. 26)

Instances of Metz's phenomenological method are too numerous to collect. Note that Chapter 1 of the book, "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," is also phenomenological in its orientation. Chapters 1 and 2 form Part I of the book's four parts which is called "Phenomenological Approaches to Film." They operate explicitly as the book's theoretical and methodological foundation. This fact is obscured, however, for several reasons: first, because most of the book that follows is cast as a search for a method, as a long, slow inquiry into linguistics, semiology, and structuralism, in order to determine principles for film analysis. The book's *own* method is often hidden beneath this overt search for a method. It is nevertheless operative, governing questions posed as well as answers produced. After Chapters 1 and 2, it is mostly an invisible text, easily dismissible as holdovers from Metz's early thinking and from the phenomenological period in France. But it is not separable from the book's principal positions. Its phenomenological assumptions operate unseen much of the time but also emerge at certain points into the text's surface. These tend to be textual stress points, at which resort to another level of discourse becomes imperative due to conflicts at the surface level.

Among other emergences is Metz's statement at the end of his long exploration of linguistics and semiology, just before he applies his method to a filmic text: *"The fact that must be under-*

stood is that films are understood." (p. 145)
And:

> Movie *spectators* in turn constitute a group of users.
> That is why the semiotics of cinema must frequently
> consider things from the point of view of the spec-
> tator rather than of the film-maker. (p. 101)
>
> (The cinema) uses only very few true signs. Some
> film images, through long previous use in speech,
> have been solidified so that they acquire stable and
> conventional meanings, become kinds of signs. But
> really vital films avoid them and are still understood.
> Therefore the nerve center of the semiological
> process lies elsewhere.
>
> The image is first and always an image. In its per-
> ceptual literalness it reproduces the signified spec-
> tacle whose signifier it is; and thus it becomes what
> it shows, to the extent that it does not have to *signify
> it* (if we take the word in the sense of *signum
> facere,* the special making of a sign). (pp. 75–76)

Thus the book does not make a journey from
phenomenology to semiology in the course of its
argument. The phenomenological text is always
there. It founds the semiological inquiry or text
by providing the base level of theorization on
which that inquiry proceeds as well as determin-
ing the method of inquiry and the standard of
judgment of its findings. Instead of a replace-
ment, there is a continuity, which is phenom-
enology's definition of semiology: a set of tools
for clarifying what is given in experience, for
understanding experience. Semiology builds on
and works with ordinary perception. It permits
us to formulate the structures of experience more
precisely. It does so, however, only by virtue of
that basis and by virtue of its continuity with
and true relation to experience. Thus are as-
serted continuities on the one hand between ex-
perience and knowledge in general and between
phenomenology and semiology as specific dis-
ciplines, i.e., at both levels of world and of
theory.

On the contrary, psychoanalysis and historical
materialism require a break with ordinary ex-
perience in order to construct its concept, in
order to construct a model of that system which
produces ordinary experience either at the psy-
chological or the political level. So, at the level
of theory, materialism stipulates an epistemo-
logical break with phenomenology as the latter-
most stage of empiricism, the large ideological
complex of several centuries' duration in philos-

ophy and in theory generally. Even a structural-
ist like Lévi-Strauss affirmed the necessity of
such a break.

> Phenomenology I found unacceptable, in so far as
> it postulated a continuity between experience and
> reality. That the latter enveloped and explained the
> former I was quite willing to agree, but I had learnt
> from my three mistresses (Freud, Marx, Geology)
> that there is no continuity in the passage between
> the two and that to reach reality we must first re-
> pudiate experience, even though we may later re-
> integrate it in an objective synthesis in which sen-
> timentality plays no part. As for the trend of
> thought which was to find fulfillment in existential-
> ism, it seemed to me to be the exact opposite of true
> thought, by reason of its indulgent attitude towards
> the illusions of subjectivity. To promote private
> preoccupations to the rank of philosophical prob-
> lems is dangerous, and may end in a kind of shop-
> girl's philosophy—excusable as an element in teach-
> ing procedure, but perilous in the extreme if it leads
> the philosopher to turn his back on his mission.
> That mission (which he holds only until science is
> strong enough to take over from philosophy) is to
> understand Being in relation to itself, and not in
> relation to oneself. Phenomenology and existential-
> ism did not abolish metaphysics: they merely intro-
> duced new ways of finding alibis for metaphysics.
> (*Tristes Tropques,* p. 50)

We have previously discussed the error of
Metz's attempt to make narrative film methodo-
logically primary. We must, however, distinguish
this point from a very different one. Once one
chooses to study the narrative film, a study
which has no priority or greater importance
than any other kind of film study, then within
that study, narrativity is centrally important.
Some of Metz's critics lump these two points
together, saying that Metz is wrongly concerned
with narrativity in film, neglecting other aspects
or values. In our view he is wrongly centered
on narrative film in relation to a general semiol-
ogy of film; but, given his study of narrative
film, as one among many, he is too little con-
cerned with narrativity itself.

From the topographical standpoint, the narra-
tological and the phenomenological are equally
important systems or discourses in *Essais I.* But
their operation in the text is neither equal nor
parallel. Seen from the dynamic standpoint,
these discourses exert pressure on each other

(and others) throughout; this conflictual interaction produces different resolutions at particular points. In Chapter 2, as we've seen, phenomenology rewrites narratology. This transformation seems determinative of the rest of the argument, at least in that an unreduced narratology never asserts itself subsequently. Two later sections on narrative, "A Non-System Language: Film Narrativity" (Ch. 3, 44–49) and "Cinema and Narrativity" (Ch. 4, 93–96), argue a point already discussed, the primacy of narrativity in film, experientially and historically.

A textual stress point at which all of the large discourses are operative is Ch. 5, Sec. 5, summarized in detail above, in which Metz presents the system of the *grande syntagmatique*. It is here that the discourses at work in the text as a while are arranged and fixed in positions of dominance and subordination, within an overall theoretical conjunction. The first four paragraphs of the section, quoted above, are worth examining in detail, as are the numerous footnotes, parentheses, etc., which indicate a text under stress from within.

Paragraph four is particularly interesting. The parallel construction of its first sentence designates the double support of the system about to unfold: phenomenology ("one must start from common observation") and film theory ("as well as on certain 'presemiotic' analyses by critics, historians and theoreticians of the cinema . . . "). Note the crucial operation of the phenomenological method here:

Common observation is thus to validate theoretical concepts; there is no need to retheorize them or to define them or to justify them theoretically. They are existents. They are real. They are located in the world. (Alain Badiou: "Such a conception pretends to find inside of the real, a knowledge of which the real can only be the object. Supposedly, this knowledge is already there, just waiting to be revealed.") Why one must rest on common observation is not stated. It is an imperative that requires/allows no questioning.

The other half of the imperative which launches Metz's system is important also: "As well as on certain 'presemiotic' analyses by critics, historians and theoreticians of the cin-

ema . . . " It is notable that in this inaugural sentence of the first semiotics of the cinema classical film theory, previously absent except in the form of particular opinions on particular points, makes such a prominent and surprising appearance. Conspicuously absent at the initiation is the structural analysis of the narrative, whether as a starting point for the semiotic analysis of filmic expression or as *a* reference point for that project or as a parallel inquiry or even as an ingredient to be included in the inquiry at its point of impact. This double marking, the absence of narratology and the sudden emergence of classical film theory—possibly the submerging or replacement of narrative analysis *by* classical film theory—determines the course and the limits of Metz's theoretical enterprise. It inscribes that project as a combinatoire of parts within larger parts, but cut off from any connection with the whole. The reliance on classical film theory rather than narrative analysis inscribes the entirety of Metz's system within the problematic of the former rather than the latter; i.e., locks it into a part-oriented, local analysis, cutting it off from that global systemic analysis which is needed.

It is easy to show that Metz's double theoretical foundation of phenomenology (continuity with ordinary experience and terminology) and classical film theory commands the concepts and execution of the *grande syntagmatique* and how they, in conjunction with the elimination of narratological analysis, determine the limitations and inadequacies of the latter. As noted, the *grande syntagmatique* says nothing about narrative parts and wholes and their relation, but it says nothing about the visual or image-track whole either. This level is not theorized as a whole, let alone related to other levels within an overall systemic model. Metz merely defines as untheorized givens, i.e., empirical entities, a number of different kinds of segments. The taxonomy that results identifies certain patterns and gives various labels to these, but it says little or nothing about them, neither why these patterns exist nor what is important about them. Metz clearly does not know what to do with the regularities he finds at the segment level. He does not know how to interpret his own findings,

so he says merely: these facts are *there*. He has produced a little clump of facts, but he has no theoretical model to fit them into, so as to make use of them, interpret them, declare their importance. And, since there was no theoretical model which launched the inquiry, he cannot account for what led to the collection of these data in the first place. Empirical studies often exhibit this doubly isolated condition.

We asked at the outset whether *Essais I* broke with film theory and established a new semilogical discourse.

It is evident that the *grande syntagmatique* does not differ fundamentally from classical film theory itself. Like Eisenstein and Bazin, Metz takes from ordinary experience or from previous discourse a basic unit—the shot—and defines several modes of its combination into the next larger unit, the sequence (which Metz calls the segment). In neither classical film theory nor Metz is there an overall model or economy of sequences within the whole. Like them also, he does not analyze narrative parts and wholes nor the system of narrative and image-track relations. The difference is that narrativity theory permits Metz (or anyone now) to analyze the general economy of the narrative layer, including definition of units and part-whole relations. This theoretical work, unavailable to Eisenstein and Bazin, might also permit theorization of the image-track, *its* parts and wholes and general economy, but Metz turns away from this possibility. In Chapter 2, he eliminates the syntagmatic *and* general systemic dimensions of narrativity theory and also lumps its various and differential definitions of unit into the vague and boundary-less "event."

Given the limitation of Metz's semiotics to the level of the image-track sequence or segment, does it do something new or different here, in relation to classical film theory? Possibly there are two things it does differently. First, classical film theory only discussed ways of combining shots into sequences, i.e., quasi-syntactic or rhetorical plans, strategies. It did not discuss or *name* or define the resulting or emergent units themselves. Thus we could say in "Two Types" that, strictly speaking, neither produced a theory of the sequence. Perhaps, with his taxonomy and conceptual distinctions among sequence types,

Metz *does* achieve a theory of the sequence, even if an inadequate, falsely based one because empirical, lacking a model of the whole, etc. Secondly, and harder to determine precisely, Metz's *grande syntagmatique* has at least a narratological flavor, because it seems to deal, however inadequately, with the time-and-space relations signified by various shot groupings. This Eisenstein and Bazin did not do, attempting some purely formal definition of shot relations. This difference may be the theoretical basis for Metz's ability to produce a theory of the sequence and a plan of sequence types.

But even this operation is rather vague and somewhat suspect for several reasons. First of all, time and space relations are only one aspect of narrativity study. Other aspects, correlative with and determinative of time and space relations, such as actantiality, Metz excises. Also, again, it is doubtful that time and space organization can be theorized or studied adequately at the level of the segment alone. The narrative as a whole, both particular narrative texts and the system of narrativity which commands such texts, disposes of time and space relations in the narrative text as a whole. The time and space relations between and among sequences or segments themselves (not just within sequences among shots) Metz says nothing about; his model cannot deal with this level, which determines time and space orderings within each segment, even if in standarized ways along the lines that Metz's taxonomy suggests.

Secondly, the imprecision of Metz's one narratological concept of "event" merges with the imprecision of his phenomenological method to prevent any theoretical or systemic rigor, even in the *grande syntagmatique*. Thus, in Section 11, quoted above, Metz speaks of the ambivalent locus of the GS categories in the film or in its narrative and of the "perpetual see-saw" between the screen instance which signifies and the diegetic instance which is signified. He says this must be accepted and even erected into a methodological principle (for it makes commutation possible). Given the initial vagueness of the narrative side of this see-saw, "the event," it is clear that nothing nearly as precise as linguistic commutation is achieved here. This vagueness and the see-saw instead permit Metz to define

cinematic units as he pleases, often making up *ad hoc* principles of a narratological sort to differentiate units.

This is evident especially in Chapters 6 and 7 where Metz applies his system to a film text, *Adieu Phillipine* (1962) by Jacques Rozier. In addition to, and probably because of, its theoretical failings, Metz's *grande syntagmatique* proves to be quite troublesome in application. Any sort of experimentation in film, even narrative experimentation, creates an immediate gap, but there are also substantial problems even with conventional narrative. Critics in France have noted many discrepancies or misapplica-

tions in the *Adieu Phillipine* reading. Indeed, Metz's own text raises a large number of doubtful cases, regarding which GS category applies to a segment, or even more fundamentally, *how* the borders of "a segment" are to be determind in a particular case—since Metz's phenomenological base assumes that segments are given, i.e., that they come already identified in viewer experience of the film. As noted, he resolves these difficulties by appeals to various, utterly heterogeneous principles and criteria. Gödel says that every system generates contradictions at its higher levels; Metz's system generates a large number of conflicts even at its first level.

BILL NICHOLS

Style, Grammar, and the Movies

Let's begin with a slogan and orientation: "A film is stylistic before it is grammatical." The ramifications of this simple assertion are what I want to examine. In due course it should become apparent that virtually all semiologically and structurally flavored writing on the cinema is founded upon incorrect assertions and false epistomology, that the privileged model for film theory cannot be the linguistics of verbal language and that, ironically, film critics usually dismissed for their Romantic aesthetics and conservative politics (like V. F. Perkins and Andrew Sarris) may be in a better position to provide the tools necessary for the development of a Marxist film theory and criticism than those openly leftist but ultimately formalist writers who have set the stage for so many of the recent controversies in film theory and criticism.

The ultimate goal of the orientation begun here is to bring about a merger of Freud and Marx—the personal and the political, the "language of the unconscious" and the structure of society—to link up visual/formal analysis with scientific, ideological analysis, to demonstrate, in fact, that the latter can and must be derived

from the former and *not* from the privileged model of verbal language.

Formal, visual analysis, in turn, has two large components—style and narrative—both being meeting places for the analog and digital,* moti-

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*These two forms are basic to all natural systems of communication. Analog communication involves continuous quantities with no significant gaps. There is no "not" nor any question of "either/or"; everything is "more or less" (for example, all nonconventionalized gestures, inflections, rhythms, and the context of communication itself). Digital communication involves discrete elements and discontinuities or gaps. It allows for saying "not" and "either/or" rather than "both/and" (as in all denotative, linguistic communication). In nature, the digital is the instrument of the analog (it is of a lower logical type and higher order of organization). In our culture the instrumental relationship is reversed. The two forms are not in opposition and the general function of the digital is to draw boundaries within the analog—as with the on/off switch of a thermostat operating within a temperature continuum, or phonemes arbitrarily carved from a sound continuum. On a broader level we might redefine the emergence of culture from nature as the "introduction of *digital communication and exchange*."[1]

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[Footnotes]

[*]Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus

Jean-Louis Baudry; Alan Williams
Film Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 2. (Winter, 1974-1975), pp. 39-47.
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